Who has School Spirit?

Explaining Voter Participation in School Board Elections

Abstract

This research note examines the correlates of turnout in Canadian school board elections. Using individual-level data from the Canadian Municipal Election Study, we find that gender, education, left-wing ideology, Conservative partisanship, and parental status were associated with participation in Calgary's 2017 public school board elections. Some of these patterns relate to the specific details of Calgary's 2017 election; others, we suggest, may be characteristic of school board elections more generally. We relate our findings to the literature on ballot roll-off and low-turnout elections.

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If turnout is an indication of public engagement in an election, then most Canadians are distinctly disengaged from school board politics. When school board elections are held concurrently with competitive and high-turnout municipal races – as in Toronto in 2014 and Calgary in 2017, for example, both of whose municipal elections had turnout rates in the mid-50-percent range – turnout rates in school board elections are ten or more points below those of the concurrent mayoral race, languishing in the mid-40s (City of Toronto, 2014; City of Calgary, 2017). When school board elections are *not* held concurrently with municipal elections, as in Quebec, turnout rates regularly drop into the single digits. (Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, 2014). Across Canada, voters appear to place little importance on school board elections.

Survey data tell much the same story. Results from the Calgary portion of the Canadian Municipal Election Study (CMES) reveal that Calgarians have extremely low levels of interest in school board politics. Respondents' average reported level of interest in municipal politics was 6.8 out of ten, compared to 7.4 for provincial politics and 7.6 for federal politics – important and statistically significant differences, but all in the same general ballpark. For school board politics, however, the average level of interest was an astonishingly low 3.9 out of 10.[2] School board politics is simply not a priority for most electors.

These low levels of turnout and interest in school board elections are especially striking in light of emerging research on the composition of voting populations in low turnout elections. Studies of school board elections in the United States, where turnout is similarly low, have noted the potential influence of well-organized groups in low-turnout elections that may have distinctly different interests from the wider population. While the effects of this phenomenon on public

[2] N=2032. These differences are statistically significant at $p<0.01$.

policy remain a matter of debate, recent research suggests that they could well be substantial: in U.S. school board elections, school districts with off-cycle elections are associated with 3 percent higher pay rates for teachers than those with on-cycle elections, possibly reflecting the greater influence of teacher unions in low-turnout elections (Anzia 2011, Moe 2006). There is every reason to believe that low turnout could have similarly important policy implications in Canada.

In this research note, we undertake what we believe to be the first individual-level study of school board elections ever conducted in Canada. Using CMES survey data from the city of Calgary, we identify several factors associated with participation in school board elections. We conduct two analyses to account for the fact that these contests are held concurrently with mayoral and council elections, and identify factors linked to turnout in school board election in particular (logistic regression models of ballot roll-off and a two-stage Heckman selection model). CMES data reveal that gender, university education, left-wing ideology, Conservative partisanship, parental status, and competitiveness of the school board race are associated with participation. Some of these variables relate to distinctive features of Calgary's 2017 school board election; others, we suggest, may apply to school board elections more generally. While our findings are necessarily preliminary, they suggest new avenues of research on voter turnout in Canadian school board and other local elections and have implications for the study of down-ballot elections more generally.

BACKGROUND

Across Canada, school boards are under threat. School board trustees often maintain that they form the heart of a democratically accountable education system, serving as the vital link between local needs and a distant provincial education bureaucracy (Sheppard et al. 2013).

However, the legitimacy of – and even the need for – school boards has been questioned in recent years, as authority over policy areas such as curriculum, teacher salaries, and budgets has inexorably migrated from the local to the provincial scale. High-profile provincial interventions in big-city school boards in Canada – Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary – bespeak an increasing willingness on the part of the provinces to intervene directly in the work of democratically elected trustees (Junker 2017, Mackie 2002, Sherlock 2016). More drastically, in 2018, the government of Nova Scotia announced the elimination of the province's seven elected English-language school boards, which are to be replaced by a single advisory council made up of provincial appointees (Alphonso 2018).[3] It is an open question as to whether these interventions would have occurred if local communities were more engaged in school board politics. Provincial governments may be more hesitant to involve themselves in the work of elected officials who can make a claim to a broad and deep democratic mandate.

Calgary's most recent public school board election, which took place on October 16, 2017, provides a good place to begin to explore school board politics at the level of individual voters. The election was noteworthy for its unusually high profile. Before the election, controversy about school board spending decisions and bus schedule policies prompted a number of incumbent retirements as well as the emergence of a conservative slate called "Students Count". The slate was endorsed by Jason Kenney, a Conservative politician, and the election involved a degree of profile and expense – extensive lawn signs, substantial media coverage, and even expensive tactics such as robocalls – that is not typical of school board races (Braid 2017, Ferguson 2017). Calgary's public school board election provides a usefully "extreme" case to explore, allowing us to

[3] The lone French-language school board was not affected by this change.

understand who participates – and who declines to participate – in school board elections when the profile of those elections is relatively high.[4]

An investigation of school board elections is also of interest because it contributes to the literature on second order elections, of which there is comparatively little in Canada. The theory of second order elections was originally developed to apply to elections to the European Parliament (Reif & Schmitt 1980), but has been expanded to also apply to elections other than those held at the national level (see Golder et al. 2017). The label of "second order" is meant to suggest that relatively little is at stake in these elections. As a result, there tend to be associated with low levels of interest and turnout (Marsh 1998; Schmitt 2005). At least by these criteria, school board elections can be considered second order - as noted above, turnout and interest in these elections was significantly lower than for federal, provincial, or other municipal offices. The analysis below allows us to consider how the low-interest, low-turnout nature of these elections has an effect upon the type of individuals who choose to vote (or not).

TURNOUT AND BALLOT ROLL-OFF

The question of why individuals choose to vote (or not) is one of the great puzzles of political science. Studies of voter turnout number in the hundreds, and scholars have identified a variety of types of factors to explain rates of elector participation. Among the variables studied are some *institutional* features of elections, such as compulsory voting, concurrent elections, and voter registration requirements (Cancela and Geys 2016, Stockemer 2017). *Contextual* variables such as campaign expenditures and the competitiveness of election are also robustly and positively linked

[4] We focus on the much higher profile public school board elections in this research note rather than the much less competitive separate board races. A high number of acclamations in the separate board (3 of 7) make our individual-level survey data less useful for analyzing participation in the Catholic board elections. We aim to explore separate school elections in future research using data from other provinces.

to turnout (Blais 2006, Cancela and Geys 2016, but see Stockemer 2017). At the *individual* level, older age, higher education, higher knowledge and interest, partisanship, and believing voting to be a duty rather than a choice are all robustly associated with turnout (Blais 2000, Geys 2006, Smets and van Ham 2013).

While studies of turnout have traditionally focused upon national elections, there is an emerging interest in participation at other levels of government, as well as *across* levels of government and election types, on the grounds that "we cannot simply assume a general equivalence of turnout determinants irrespective of the type of election" (Cancela and Geys 2016: 265). Though research suggests that many of the factors shaping turnout at higher levels are also active at the local scale (Hamilton 1971), there are variables which have a unique effect at this level of government. Contextual factors such as population size (Breux et al. 2017) and the non-partisan nature of local contests (Schaffner et al. 2001) have been shown to affect turnout in a manner unique to the local level. In terms of individual-level characteristics, homeownership and the length of time that one has lived in a municipality are both known to increase municipal turnout (McGregor & Spicer 2016; DiPasquale and Glaeser 1999). Thus while local contests have much in common with other elections, there are nevertheless a series of factors that affect turnout at the local level exclusively.

Researchers have also considered patterns of turnout in elections where multiple races are contested simultaneously. This research is of particular relevance to the current study, given that one of the unique features of Canadian local elections is that this is the only instance where electors have the opportunity to vote in multiple elections simultaneously. In such a scenario, it is possible to cast a ballot for one position but abstain from voting in others. Most research on ballot roll-off – voting for a "top of ballot" position, such as mayor, while refraining from voting in concurrent

"down-ballot" contests, such as for council or school board – originates in the United States, where concurrent elections are the norm for national, state, municipal and judicial elections (see Walker 1966; Nichols 1998; Hall 2007; Bullock and Dunn 1996 for examples of each). This work suggests that variables such as partisanship, campaign spending, information, and policy importance are important for understanding roll-off (Hall and Bonneau 2008, Lassen 2005, Streb and Frederick 2011). Patterns of participation in down-ballot elections have also been shown to increase when electors have high levels of information (Lassen 2005, Matsusaska 1995) and when the "stakes are high", meaning that voters care about the consequences of the outcome (Andersen et al. 2014).

Thus far, there has been only one individual-level examination of ballot roll-off conducted in Canada (McGregor 2018) and, to our knowledge, no studies of turnout in Canadian school board elections have ever been undertaken. Research on this topic is important not only because participation in school board elections, and the policy consequences of such participation, is a topic of academic debate, but also because it will allow us to better understand the factors that shape turnout when institutional and socio-demographic contextual factors are shared across two concurrent elections. Doing so speaks to the research agenda, identified by Cancela and Geys (2016), of identifying the determinants of turnout for specific levels of government and elected positions.

Our goal, then, is to explore the factors that are *distinctively* related to participation in school board elections. Since we have little research to guide us on this specific topic, we draw on the broader literature on down-ballot elections and roll-off. Research on Canadian municipal roll-off indicates that demographic variables including age, income, and ethnicity play a role in voters' decisions to participate in down-ballot council races (McGregor, 2018), and we therefore begin by exploring the sociodemographic factors that may be linked to school board turnout. These include

the variables in McGregor's analysis listed above along with two others: university education, which is connected to turnout in general (Geys 2006) and may be particularly important for participation in elections directly related to education; and gender, on the assumption that potentially higher levels of women's participation in school board politics (Tolley 2011) may also be reflected in higher participation in elections.

A second potentially important set of factors is partisanship and ideology. Research on municipal and down-ballot races in the United States has found higher turnout rates in partisan than non-partisan elections, as party cues make down-ballot decisions easier to make for individuals with partisan ties (Schaffner et al 2001, Schaffner and Streb 2002). While Calgary's 2017 school board election was officially non-partisan, it did involve a slate of conservative candidates called "Students Count" which was endorsed by a known Conservative politician (Kenney). We might therefore expect to find that partisanship is linked to participation in the Calgary school board election. We also include ideology in our analysis for two reasons: to account for the possibility that public education may be more salient for those on the left than those on the right, and because it serves as a control in our test of partisanship, rather than ideology, on school board participation.

Finally, the distinctive policy focus of school board elections prompts us to examine the role of *parenthood* on participation. Simply having children may provoke a connection to school board politics in what we might think of as a 'sociotropic' fashion, as parents conceive of themselves as members of the community of voters for whom education policy is most relevant. Alternatively, having children presently in school may stimulate participation by virtue of a more immediate and 'egocentric' connection to the school system.

DATA AND METHODS

Our analysis is based on survey data collected from eligible voters during the 2017 Calgary municipal and school board elections.[5] The data were collected as part of the Canadian Municipal Election Study, a larger comparative study of elections in eight Canadian cities. Respondents completed a campaign-period survey as well as a post-election survey.[6] In Calgary, the CMES questionnaire includes questions on turnout in the mayoral, council and school board elections, as well as those related to our sociodemographic and attitudinal explanatory variables of interest – a full list of questions is found in Appendix I. A total of 1,145 respondents provided answers to the questions required for our analysis here.[7]

We undertake two analyses to identify the correlates of school board turnout. The first uses a binary measure of roll-off as an outcome variable: a value of 1 indicates that the respondent voted in *both* the mayoral and the school board election, and 0 indicates that the respondent "rolled off", voting in the mayoral election but not in the school board contest. We also analyze roll-off from the city council to the school board ballot. These analyses allow us to identify the factors that are distinctive to participation in school trustee elections, rather than to turnout in local elections more generally. All told, 18.6% of respondents in our sample rolled off from the mayoral to the school board ballot, and 15.5% rolled off from council to school board.[8]

Since turnout in Calgary's 2017 mayoral race (58%) was very high, both in comparison to other municipalities (Edmonton's election on the same day saw a turnout of just 31.5%) and to

[5] Data and replication files for the analyses in this paper are available at https://doi.org/10.5683/SP2/O57YP9

[6] Survey respondents were recruited in two ways. Most (1,306 of the 1,486 respondents) were recruited through random digit dialing (RDD), and then directed by a live operator to an online survey. The remainder (180) were recruited from an existing online survey panel. Our findings in the analysis below does not differ if the sample is limited to either the RDD or panel respondents.

[7] Since our focus is on the city's public school board elections, these 1,145 respondents are those who were registered for (or indicated that they could register for) the public rather than separate school board election.

[8] See Appendix II for bivariate analyses of relationships between roll-off and our statistics on all variables used in the analyses below.

Calgary's past mayoral elections (39.4% in 2013), our examination of ballot roll-off is particularly well suited to this election. In general, elections with high rates of turnout at the top of the ballot tend have high rates of roll-off to down-ballot elections. The assumption here is that a high-profile mayoral race will attract voters who might not otherwise participate. Compared to those who would vote regardless of the profile of the mayoral race, these less frequent voters are relatively unlikely to vote in down-ballot races. Calgary's 2017 roll-off rates are consistent with this argument. The aggregate roll-off rates from mayoral to school board elections in the election were higher (28.8%) than in Edmonton (14.3%) or than in Calgary in 2013 (20.9%) (City of Calgary 2013, 2017; City of Edmonton 2017). All else equal, higher roll-off rates create more statistical leverage with which to isolate the correlates of ballot completion, making this is a good case in which to study participation in school board elections.[9]

Analyzing roll-off rather than school board turnout allows us to disentangle the correlates of school board turnout from mayoral or council turnout; since every respondent in our sample who voted in school board elections also voted in the mayoral and council elections, a more straightforward analysis of school board turnout would be confounded by the factors that influence municipal election participation more generally. However, this approach comes at the cost of discarding those respondents who did not participate in the municipal election at all. We thus supplement the first analysis with a Heckman selection model, which is a two-stage modelling approach which explicitly models the process by which respondents choose to participate in the municipal election and *then* choose to complete their ballot by participating in the school board

[9] It is well documented that rates of turnout estimated using survey data are substantially higher than among the actual population. We suspect that this phenomenon applies in the CMES to reported turnout at the mayoral, council and school board elections, in large part due to social desirability pressures (which may prompt some non-voters to report having voted). We see no reason to expect, however, that this pressure would have different effects on responses towards turnout at the three different levels. That is, we do not anticipate that over-reporting in turnout poses problems for our ability to draw inferences from our roll-off and Heckman analyses.

race (Streb and Frederick 2011). Our first-stage model captures a suite of sociodemographic and attitudinal variables known to be associated with municipal turnout. Our second-stage model is meant to identify those factors associated with school board turnout, in particular, and it includes the same explanatory variables as our roll-off analysis. This approach allows us to test the correlates of school board participation while explicitly modelling the process by which school board voters are selected from among those who are voting in the top-of-ballot mayoral race.

In keeping with our discussion above, we focus on three sets of independent variables when identifying the correlates of school board turnout: sociodemographic characteristics, partisan and ideology variables, and parental status (including both having a child and having a child in public school). To account for the fact that turnout in general has been consistently linked to the closeness of a race (Cancela and Geys 2016) and that roll-off rates are thought to decrease as the competitiveness of down-ballot races increases (McGregor 2018), we also include a measure of competitiveness of school board races. This variable is based upon the margin of victory in each school board district, comparing the winning candidate to the second place finisher.

RESULTS

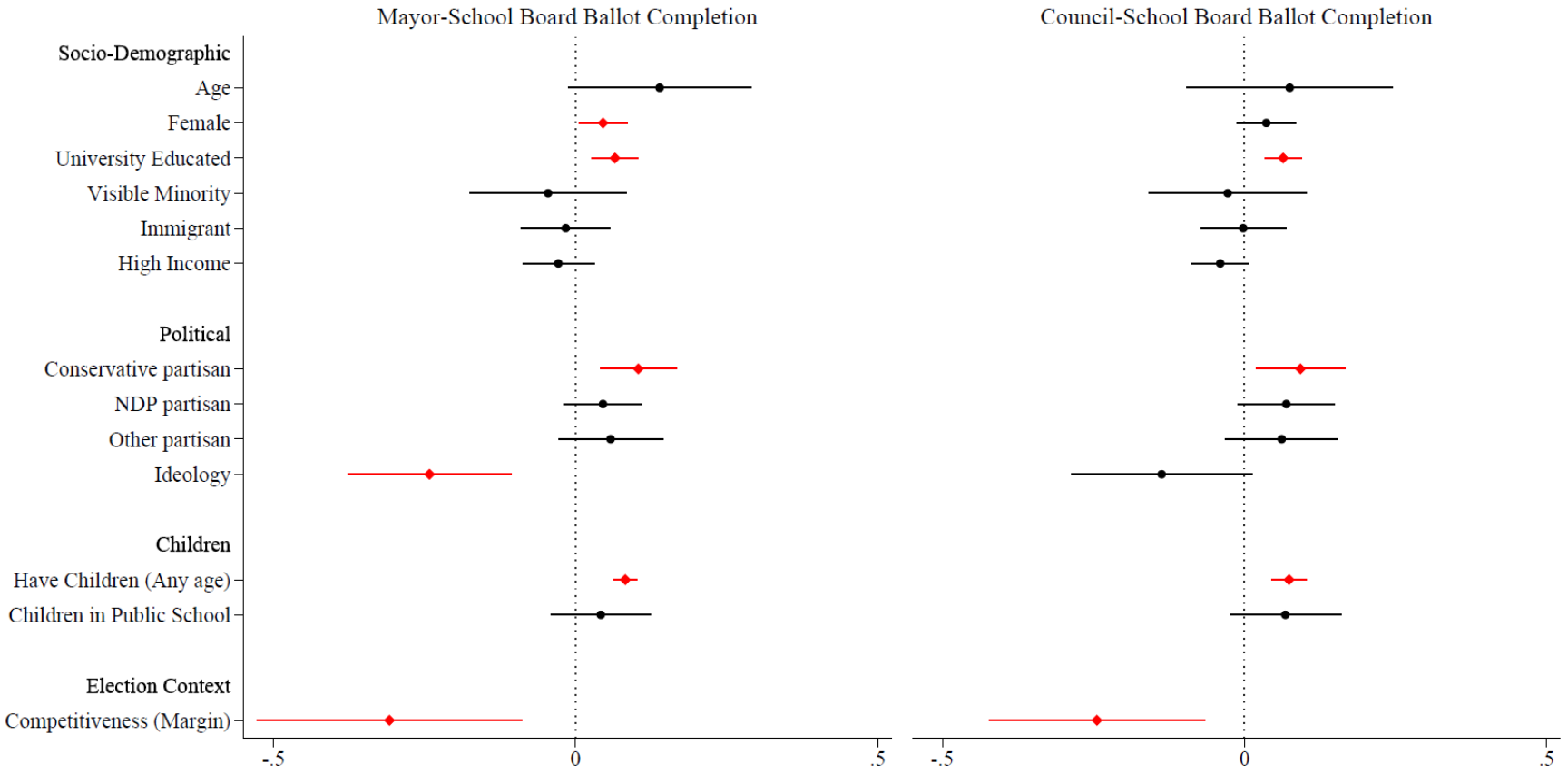
The results of our first analyses, summarized in Figure 1, capture the results of two logistic regression models using roll-off from mayoral to school board and council to school board elections as our respective dependent variables. Explanatory variables (all of which are coded to range from 0 to 1) include those mentioned above. Among our sociodemographic variables, age is coded in years, and all others are dummies. For partisanship we included dummies for Conservative (those who identify with either the Albertan United Conservative Party, Wildrose Party, or Progressive Conservative Party), NDP, and other partisans, while non-partisans serve as

the baseline category. Ideology ranges from 0 (left-wing) to 1 (right-wing). The variables related to children are both dummies (have children or not and have children in school or not).[10] Finally, the competitiveness variable reflects the margin of victory of the winning candidate over the second place finisher.

The figure reports point estimates for marginal effects, as well as 95% confidence intervals (whiskers). Statistically significant effects ($p<0.05$) are marked in red, while insignificant results are black. Since a value of 1 for the outcome variables indicates ballot completion (0 means school board abstention), positive entries in the figure indicate higher likelihood of participation in school board elections. To account for ward-level variation, we report standard errors clustered by ward. and include ward fixed effects in our final model of ballot roll-off. The full table of coefficients, along with additional models and robustness tests, are available in Appendix III.

[10] Given the nature of these variables, the "have children in school" variable is to be interpreted in the same manner as an interaction term. Given that having children is necessary for having children in school, there are no cases in our sample where respondents do not have children, but who have children in school. As such, the 'children in school' variable is to be interpreted as the *additional* effect of being enrolled in school, as compared to simply having children.

Figure 1: The Correlates of Ballot Roll-off



Entries report marginal effects and 95% confidence intervals from logistic regression. Diamond-shaped (red) coefficients are statistically significant at $p<0.05$. N=756 in both models. Number of clusters=7.

Figure 1 points to several factors that have a statistically significant relationship with roll-off to school board elections, including two sociodemographic characteristics: gender and education. Women who vote in the mayoral election are more likely than their male counterparts to also vote in school board elections ($p < 0.05$). We direction of the effect of this variable is the same in the council model, though this result is not significant (p=0.15). There are no such mixed results for education, however. University-educated respondents are significantly more likely to complete their school board ballot than are Calgarians who lack a university degree.

Two of the political variables also display a relationship with school board turnout. First, Conservative partisanship increases the probability of ballot completion by an estimated 9 percentage points, as compared to non-partisans. Though the difference between Conservative and other partisans is insignificant, it appears conceivable that the conservative Students Count slate had the effect of mobilizing one type of provincial partisan in particular. At the same time, while NDP partisanship is not statistically significant in either model, left-wing ideology is associated with ballot completion (recall that a high value for the ideology variable indicates right-wing ideology, so the negative coefficient here indicates that those on the right side of the spectrum are relatively unlikely to complete their ballots). This variable is statistically significant in the mayoral model, and is close to being so in the council model (p=0.07). This presents us with an intriguing combination of findings: while those with right-wing ideologies were *less* likely to participate in the school board election, Conservative partisanship *increases* an individual's likelihood of participating. This finding suggests to us that high-profile Conservative endorsements of the "Students Count" slate may have proven to motivate Conservative partisans to participate in the school board election. We return to this finding in more detail below.

Next, our parenthood variables suggest that having children, regardless of their age, proves to be more important for participation in school board elections than having children currently enrolled in school. Even in the face of controls for sociodemographics, partisanship, and the competitiveness of a race, having children increases the likelihood of ballot completion by nearly eight percentage points, a large and substantively important relationship.

Finally, the competitiveness variable has a significant effect upon school board turnout, in the direction that one would expect. That is, the closer the outcome of the school board race, the more likely it is that those individuals who cast votes in races at the top of the ballot will also vote in the school board election. This variable is significant in both the mayoral and council models.

As a robustness check on our findings, we turn to our second analysis, which uses a two-stage Heckman selection setup to first model municipal (mayoral) turnout and then turnout in the school board race; we then undertake the same analysis using council turnout and school board turnout.[11] These results are summarized in Table 1.[12]

Wald test of independent equations: $p < 0.05$ for both mayoral and council models

[11] We remove some demographic variables (visible minority, immigrant, and high income) from the logistic regression to avoid overfitting and to increase sample size due to non-response in the "income" variable; including these variables alters the level of significance and precision, but not the direction or significance, of the results reported here. Note also that three municipal-election-specific variables are included in the first-stage model but excluded from the second-stage model.

[12] The Wald test reported at the bottom of Table 1 indicates that the Heckman selection model is appropriate for these data – as expected, a straightforward model of school board turnout would be biased by selection effects.

Table 1: School Board Turnout – Heckman Selection Model

Stage 1 – Mayoral Turnout		
	Coef.	SE
Age	1.10***	0.37
Female	-0.03	0.13
University Educated	0.04	0.13
Homeowner	0.26*	0.15
Partisan - Conservative	-0.12	0.15
Partisan – NDP	0.54**	0.23
Other Partisan	0.30	0.26
Ideology	0.11	0.36
Have Child	-0.02	0.16
Child in School	-0.14	0.18
Municipal Interest	0.05**	0.02
Municipal Knowledge	1.37***	0.25
Municipal Duty to Vote	0.60***	0.13
Margin of Victory (SB)	1.09	0.67
Stage 2 – School Board Turnout		
Age	0.33	0.28
Female	0.18*	0.10
University Educated	0.22**	0.10
Homeowner	-0.16	0.14
Partisan - Conservative	0.42***	0.14
Partisan – NDP	0.11	0.16
Other Partisan	0.17	0.20
Ideology	-0.95***	0.30
Have Child	0.31**	0.12
Child in School	0.06	0.16
Margin of Victory	-1.12**	0.50

Stage 1 – Council Turnout		
	Coef.	SE
Age	1.29***	0.34
Female	0.04	0.12
University Educated	0.11	0.12
Homeowner	0.15	0.15
Partisan - Conservative	-0.05	0.15
Partisan – NDP	0.21	0.20
Other Partisan	0.26	0.25
Ideology	-0.53	0.34
Have Child	0.07	0.15
Child in School	-0.16	0.17
Municipal Interest	0.03	0.02
Municipal Knowledge	1.51***	0.24
Municipal Duty to Vote	0.63***	0.12
Margin of Victory (SB)	0.36	0.61
Stage 2 – School Board Turnout		
Age	0.06	0.31
Female	0.17	0.11
University Educated	0.20*	0.11
Homeowner	-0.08	0.15
Partisan - Conservative	0.43***	0.15
Partisan – NDP	0.27	0.17
Other Partisan	0.22	0.21
Ideology	-0.57*	0.32
Have Child	0.29**	0.13
Child in School	0.21	0.18
Margin of Victory	-1.00*	0.53

Heckman selection model, dual probit. N=990 (890 selected, 100 unselected in mayoral model, 862 selected, 128 unselected in council model).
* p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01
Wald test of independent equations: p< 0.05 for both mayoral and council models

The Heckman selection results are very similar to those from the roll-off models above. Again, we find evidence that women and university educated electors are more likely to participate in school board elections, although the gender variable is once again not significant in the council/school board analysis. All other findings in Table 1 are identical in direction and significance to those in Figure 1. Conservative partisans and those on the ideological left are again especially likely to participate in school board elections. Those with children are more likely to be

school board voters, but having children in school does not have an independent effect. Election closeness, as above, is significantly related to participation.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis has identified a number of variables which are linked to participation in school board elections. We aim to use these relationships to build and test new hypotheses concerning school board turnout in future research. In the meantime, however, we suggest two broad features of our findings which may worth of consideration in future research.

First is the role of *information* in turnout. As recent roll-off studies have demonstrated (Lassen 2005), the information that voters possess is clearly linked to participation; those without adequate information may refrain from voting because they consider uninformed voting to be risky (Matsusaka 1995) or would prefer to leave the decision to those who are better informed (Feddersen and Pesendorfer 1996). Whatever the exact mechanism, one variable in our analysis – Conservative partisanship – appears to provide some support for the information thesis. Unlike many school board elections, Calgary's 2017 race was coloured by explicit and asymmetrical partisanship: Conservatives responded to the existence of the "Students Count" slate, while partisans of other parties did not turn out at rates any higher than did non-partisans. One possible explanation for this difference could be that the slate served as a cue, or informational shortcut, for Conservative partisans. That is, they may have been more likely to vote because they have information which makes their vote decision simpler. For opposition partisans, the partisan cue is less obvious – even if they know that they do not want to vote for the "Students Count" candidate, it may be unclear which other candidate they should support. The presence of this partisan cue may therefore have had differential effects upon supporters of different parties. Of course, we must

also recognize the possibility that Conservative partisans, for some other reason, may generally have relatively high rates of turnout in school board elections. Future research on an election without such a clear party cue is necessary to determine which of these two explanations is correct.

The second important pattern in our findings and past research is that turnout is higher when more is "at stake" in a particular election (Andersen et al. 2014, Ervik 2011). In the case of school boards, this may well apply to those for whom education policy is thought to be more important as a result of ideological commitments or parental status. Interestingly, however, those for whom the most would appear to be at stake – parents whose children are currently in the public system – are no more likely to participate than parents in general. Whether this is a genuine pattern in other contexts or a result of ceiling effects in our data (those with children are already very likely to participate, making it difficult to discern the additional effect of having children in the school system) is a question to be answered with a larger dataset in the future.

Finally, participation in school board elections may reflect a mix of the two factors. For instance, highly educated voters may find it easier to acquire information about school board politics, or they may feel that more is at stake in school board politics due to their own investment in education – or both. The same may be true of women, whose participation may reflect access to information (due to persistently gendered childcare roles) or, for the same reason, a higher awareness of the stakes of school board politics.

Whatever the processes which drive increased participation in school board elections may turn out to be, what we *can* conclude from this analysis is that the composition of the voting public in Canadian school boards is very likely to be distinct from that of municipal voters, probably tilted toward ideologically left-leaning and highly educated parents (and perhaps, depending on local cues, particular partisans as well). These compositional differences, having been identified,

could now be investigated using aggregate election and census data as well as survey data in other cities. Given recent research on municipal responsiveness to local electorates (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014), these compositional differences may well have effects on policy (Anzia 2011). Our findings in this study suggest that these possibilities are well worth exploring in the Canadian context.

CONCLUSION

This research note represents a first foray into the study of political behaviour in Canadian school board elections. We have identified several sociodemographic and attitudinal characteristics associated with participation in those contests, demonstrated the importance of having children for school board participation and shown that the competiveness of contests affects school board turnout rates. At a broader scale, our findings suggest that the composition of school board electorates is shaped by key demographic and life-course variables – school board electorates are likely to be more well-educated, for instance, and contain more parents than the general public – and also by ideology and, at least in Calgary's case, by partisanship.

These findings are just the beginning. Research from the United States (Moe 2005; Anzia 2011) suggests that teachers in that country may be particularly engaged in school board elections. The influence of teachers their unions in these elections has yet to be considered, however, in Canada. Though not available in the CMES dataset, data on occupation and school board participation would add to our understanding of school board turnout. There would also be value in studying turnout patterns in other Canadian contexts. Comparing differences in participation in settings where school system differences may be more salient for local residents – such as Catholic versus public school boards in Ontario, or English-language and French-language school boards

in Quebec – will also clarify what motivates some voters to participate in school board elections. Given recent school board controversies across Canada, debates about the purpose and democratic legitimacy of school boards are likely to continue in the coming years. Academic research on overall levels of interest and engagement in school board elections, along with research on patterns of participation in school board politics, can make a valuable contribution to these debates.

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ONLINE APPENDIX I: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Interest in politics

How Interested are you in Municipal Politics? In Provincial Politics? In Federal Politics? In School Board politics? <0 (not at all interested), …, 10 (very interested)>

Interval level variable coded from 0 (not at all interested) to 1 (very interested).

Ballot completion

When multiple elections are held at the same time, many people vote for some positions, but not for others. Which races did you vote in? Please check all that apply. <Mayoral, countil and school board>

Dummy variable coded as 1 if voted in both mayoral and school board, and 0 if voted in mayoral election only.

Sociodemographic characteristics

Age: In what year were you born? Please enter your year of birth in the box below. *Dummy variables for under 35 and over 64 (35 to 64 as baseline).*

Gender: Are you: <male, female > *Dummy coded as male (0) or female (1).*

Education: What is the highest level of education that you have completed? *Dummy variable coded as university education (1) or less (0).*

Income: Which of the following best indicates your annual household income before taxes? *Dummy variable coded as above median (1) or below (0).*

Visible minority: To which ethnic or cultural group or groups do you belong. *Dummy variable coded as non-European (1) or European (0) ancestry.*

Immigrant: Were you born in Canada? *Dummy variable coded as no (1) or yes (0).*

Parental variables

If you have children, what type of school do they attend?

<Do not have children, they do not attend school, they attend public school, they attend separate (Catholic) school), they attend another type of school.> *Dummy variables set up for those which children in public and Catholic schools, with all other respondents as baseline.*

Have children: If you have children, do you have sons, daughter, or both? <Do not have children, son(s) only, Daughter(s) only, Both son(s) and daughter(s)> *Dummy variable compares those with no children (0) to those with them (1)*

In which School board are you registered to vote? If you are not already registered, which board will you/would you register for? <Public (Calgary Board of Education), Catholic (Calgary Catholic School District)> *(Used to assign electors to a board when calculating competitiveness)*

ONLINE APPENDIX II: BIVARIATE ANALYSES

This appendix provides bivariate comparisons of ballot completion with each of our explanatory variables. Table II-1 shows the share of respondents who "completed" their ballot by voting in both the mayoral and school board race (first column of results) or the council and school board race (column 2). For each category (with the exception of ward), we ran t-tests to determine if differences were statistically significant. Baseline categories are italicized.

Table II-1: Ballot Completion – Bivariate Analysis

	Mayor to School Board	Council to School Board
Overall	**81.37%**	**84.47%**
Under 50	77.8% (N = 315)	82.8% (N = 296)
50 and over	83.8% (N = 650)**	85.8% (N = 635)
Men	79.3% (N = 508)	82.8% (N = 487)
Women	83.4% (N = 494)*	86.2% (N = 478)
White	81.7% (M = 873)	84.4% (N = 845)
Visible Minority	78.3% (N = 120)	83.9% (N = 112)
Canadian Born	81.6% (N = 839)	84.5% (N = 811)
Immigrant	79.4% (N = 165)	84.0% (N = 156)
No University Education	77.4% (N = 474)	81.4% (N = 451)
University Education	84.8% (N = 532)***	87.1% (N = 518)**
Income below $100,000	80.9% (N = 481)	84.6% (N = 460)
Income above $100,000	81.0% (N = 384)	83.4% (N = 373)
Non-Partisan	77.5% (N = 302)	79.9% (N = 293)
Conservative	81.5% (N = 460)	85.0% (N = 441)*
NDP	87.0% (N = 161)**	89.7% (N = 156)***
Other Partisan	83.7% (N = 86)	87.8% (N = 82)
Ideologically left (0-4)	86.5% (N = 281)	87.4% (N = 278)
Ideological centre (5)	81.4% (N = 264)	83.7% (N = 257)
Ideological right (6-10)	78.6% (N = 408)***	82.9% (N = 387)
No child	74.5% (N = 318)	78.2% (N = 303)
Have child	84.5% (N = 679)***	87.4% (N = 657)***
No child in school	80.5% (N = 854)	83.4% (N = 8240
Child in school	86.3% (N = 146)	90.6% (N = 139)
Ward 1/2 Race	78.1% (N = 146)	81.4% (N = 140)
Ward 3/4 Race	80.0% (N = 140)	83.6% (N = 134)
Ward 5/10 Race	87.5% (N = 72)	91.3% (N = 69)
Ward 6/7 Race	84.3% (N = 166)	85.9% (N = 163)
Ward 8/9 Race	82.6% (N = 155)	84.8% (N = 151)
Ward 11/13 Race	75.3% (N = 190)	79.9% (N = 179)
Ward 12/14 Race	86.4% (N = 140)	89.0% (N = 136)

*: $p < 0.01$, **: $p < 0.05$, ***: $p < 0.01$

ONLINE APPENDIX III: LOGISTIC REGRESSION TABLES

Tables III-1 and III-2 provide full results for the analysis reported in Figure 1 of the main text for roll-off from mayoral and council elections to the school board level. Figure 1 is based upon Model E from each of the tables below). We also provide several other specifications to test the robustness of our findings, including a model (F) that includes ward-level fixed effects).

Table III-1: Ballot Completion – Mayor to School Board Table III-1: Ballot Completion – Mayor to School Board

Table III-1: Ballot Completion – Mayor to School Board Table III-1: Ballot Completion – Mayor to School Board

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D		Model E		Model F	
Age	0.177**	0.0751	0.190**	0.075	0.111	0.076	0.132*	0.078	0.139*	0.078	0.219**	0.104
Female	0.056***	0.018	0.054***	0.020	0.048**	0.019	0.048***	0.020	0.045**	0.020	0.067*	0.034
University Educated	0.072***	0.0213	0.075***	0.023	0.068***	0.021	0.067***	0.020	0.065***	0.020	0.101**	0.041
Visible Minority	-0.026	0.071	-0.030	0.067	-0.0340	0.064	-0.037	0.063	-0.046	0.066	-0.058	0.069
Immigrant	-0.020	0.039	-0.012	0.040	-0.0180	0.040	-0.020	0.038	-0.016	0.038	-0.023	0.059
High Income	-0.024	0.033	-0.018	0.034	-0.0312	0.034	-0.032	0.030	-0.029	0.030	-0.041	0.044
Conservative			0.108***	0.031	0.0989***	0.031	0.101***	0.032	0.104***	0.032	0.143**	0.058
NDP			0.047	0.036	0.0471	0.033	0.046	0.033	0.045	0.033	0.064	0.062
Other Partisan			0.050	0.047	0.0516	0.045	0.051	0.044	0.058	0.044	0.074	0.079
Ideology			-0.237***	0.075	-0.239***	0.074	-0.241***	0.069	-0.242***	0.069	-0.353**	0.148
Have Child					0.0925***	0.012	0.080***	0.010	0.082***	0.010	0.120**	0.051
Child in School							0.040	0.043	0.042	0.043	0.064	0.068
Margin of Victory									-0.308***	0.112		
Ward Fixed Effects	No		No		No		No		No		Yes	
N	780		780		780		780		780		780	

Logistic regression (marginal effects). Standard errors in second column. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01

Table III-2: Ballot Completion – Council to School Board

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D		Model E		Model F	
Age	0.105	0.087	0.112	0.084	0.034	0.086	0.066	0.091	0.075	0.087	0.124	0.108
Female	0.0415*	0.024	0.042	0.026	0.037	0.024	0.037	0.024	0.036	0.025	0.056	0.040
University Educated	0.069***	0.018	0.073***	0.018	0.066***	0.016	0.065***	0.0156	0.064***	0.015	0.105**	0.042
Visible Minority	-0.010	0.068	-0.015	0.065	-0.018	0.063	-0.022	0.064	-0.028	0.067	-0.035	0.074
Immigrant	0.000	0.036	0.007	0.037	-0.0001	0.036	-0.003	0.036	-0.002	0.036	-0.004	0.062
High Income	-0.033	0.025	-0.029	0.028	-0.041	0.027	-0.043	0.027	-0.040*	0.024	-0.063	0.046
Conservative			0.095***	0.036	0.086**	0.037	0.090**	0.036	0.093**	0.037	0.132**	0.060
NDP			0.071	0.044	0.072*	0.040	0.070*	0.041	0.069*	0.041	0.102*	0.061
Other Partisan			0.057	0.053	0.058	0.051	0.058	0.048	0.062	0.048	0.082	0.079
Ideology			-0.128*	0.075	-0.13*	0.077	-0.133*	0.079	-0.137*	0.077	-0.209	0.145
Have Child					0.090***	0.015	0.073***	0.015	0.074***	0.014	0.115**	0.052
Child in School							0.066	0.047	0.068	0.047	0.106	0.074
Margin of Victory									-0.244***	0.091		
Ward Fixed Effects	No		No		No		No		No		Yes	
N	756		756		756		756		756		756	

Logistic regression (marginal effects). Standard errors in second column. * $p<0.10$ ** $p<0.05$ *** $p< 0.01$